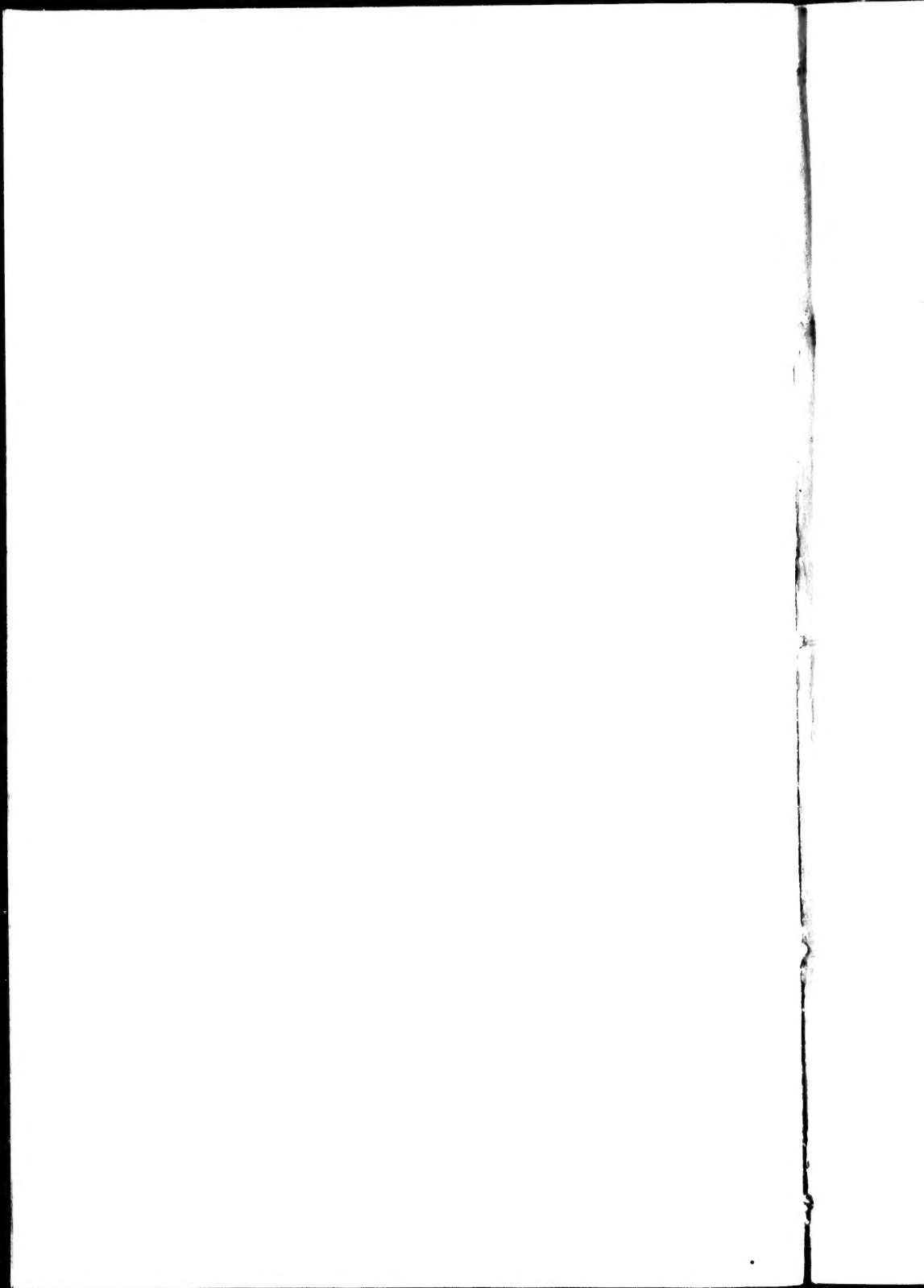




THE
CONNEXION
BETWEEN THE
CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS
STATE OF SOCIETY,
A
SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW
SCOTCH CHURCH,

CALLED
ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH,

IN THE CITY OF QUEBEC,

ON FRIDAY THE 30th DAY OF NOVEMBER, 1810.

BY ALEXANDER SPARK, D. D.

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TO
HIS EXCELLENCY
SIR JAMES HENRY CRAIG,
KNIGHT
OF THE MOST HONORABLE ORDER
OF THE BATH,
CAPTAIN GENERAL AND GOVERNOR IN CHIEF
IN
BRITISH NORTH AMERICA,
&c. &c.

This DISCOURSE

IS

Most Humbly and most Respectfully

INSCRIBED,

By His Excellency's

Faithful & Obedient Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

Quebec, 8th Jan. 1811.

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A S E R M O N.

PSAL. 122—9.

Because of the House of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.

FROM the tenour of this Psalm, we perceive that it must have been written after the City of Jerusalem had been enlarged, fortified and embellished, by King David; and after the Tribes of Israel, according to the appointment of the Law, had begun to repair thither, three times a year, to attend upon the institutions of their religion. How long after this period its date ought to be placed, doth not fully appear. If, by the title, which is in these words, “A Song of degrees of David”, we are to understand that it was actually penned by that pious Prince, and not merely in imitation of his manner, as some have imagined, it must have been composed before the building of the Temple; so that by the House of the Lord, which then

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was, could only be meant the Tabernacle, which was prepared for the Ark of the Covenant, within the City of David, or Fortress of Zion. Admitting, however, that the Temple was not then built, and that David was the Author of the Psalm, it is reasonable to suppose that he would be looking forward, with delight, to the completion of that design, which he himself had formed, and which he was assured would be accomplished by Solomon his son.

It is generally believed that this sacred hymn is one of those, which were publicly sung, at the three grand festivals of the Jews; while some expressions contained in it, render it highly probable that it was sung also by the Tribes, on their journey, in going up to Jerusalem, to attend upon those Solemnities. The sentiments, which it contains, are peculiarly suited to such an occasion. The people are therein taught to express their joy at the return of those seasons, which brought them up thither to worship; where was now the Ark of the Covenant, the emblem of the Divine presence; and where were set "The Thrones of Judgment, the Thrones of the House of David". They are instructed to express their gratitude for the privileges, both civil and religious, which they enjoyed, and to pray for the peace and prosperity of the City.

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To such sentiments and duty they excite and encourage one another, saying.—“ Pray for the
 “ peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that
 “ love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and
 “ prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions sakes, I will now say,
 “ peace be within thee. Because of the House
 “ of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.”

As the Ark of the Covenant, which had before experienced so many vicissitudes, being removed from place to place, and even some time in the power of the enemy, had now obtained a fixed abode, secure against future danger, under the protection of a pious Prince and regular government,—it was meet and becoming that the people, who were attached to their ancient institutions, and who valued the blessings of true religion above all other things, should express their gratitude to God on that account, and pray for the peace and prosperity of the Government, under which they now enjoyed that happy security.

It is presumed it will not be thought foreign to the design, which the Psalmist had in view, or to the sentiments which he meant to communicate, in this Psalm, if from the words of the Text, we take occasion,

I. To shew that there is a necessary connexion between the civil and religious state of Society : And

II. To inquire what we ought to learn from this Fact.—

It is not here meant to advert to any alliance between Church and State, which, according to the polity of Nations, may be formed by mutual voluntary Compact. The connexion between the civil and religious state of society, which we are here led to consider, and to which it is meant, at present, to direct your attention, is altogether of a different kind. It is a mutual moral influence, resulting from the nature of things, according to the will of God,—which no human power or compact can either form or dissolve.

For the sake of distinction, this connexion may be considered as consisting of two parts : 1st, of the influence, which civil society receives from religion ; and 2dly, of that, which religion receives from the character and conduct of the civil Power.

With regard to the first of these, it is presumed none will deny, that such an influence doth actually exist. In every Nation it may be observed,

ed, that the manners of men take a bias from their religious sentiments and belief. If these sentiments be of a good moral tendency the bias, which they produce, will, of course, be in favour of virtue, order and tranquility. But when they are of a contrary character, as hath sometimes been the case, their effects are unfavourable to moral improvement. Whatever sentiments men receive, under the name and sanction of religion, are generally very deeply rooted in the mind, and produce a very powerful effect on the conduct. Hence men have been sometimes led to believe the practice of immoral deeds to be a part of their religious duty.

But with such effects of mistaken principles of religion, or of what may be more properly termed superstition, we are not particularly concerned in the present argument. Our principal object here is, to point out the beneficial effects of true religion, on the moral improvement of mankind, and consequently in promoting the peace and order of civil Society.

To this end, let us then ask ourselves, what is that temper of mind, that the religion of Christ, which we profess, tends to inspire,—and that conduct, which its precepts require and its doctrines recommend? The fruits of the Christian

tian Spirit, as the Scripture teacheth us, are
 “ Love joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,
 “ goodness, faith, (or fidelity), meekness, and
 temperance.” * The faith and discipline of the
 Gospel tend to humanize the temper, and im-
 prove the heart,—to make men lovers of peace,
 order, and humanity,—affectionate to their bre-
 thren, and benevolent to all mankind. It re-
 quires the strictest attention to all the rules of
 moral rectitude,—the practice of justice, indus-
 try, sobriety,—and that we do to all men, “ as
 “ we would that they should do unto us,”—that
 we obey magistrates, “ not only for wrath but
 “ for Conscience sake ;” considering that they
 are “ Ministers of God to us for good ;” and
 that “ the powers that be, are ordained of God :”
 All which things obviously tend to the peace and
 order of Society.

But will it be said, perhaps, that all these du-
 ties might be made the subject of civil Laws,
 and enjoined by human authority, with-
 out the aid of religion ?—That they might be en-
 joined by mere human authority, no one will de-
 ny. But what effect would such injunction pro-
 duce ? How weak and ineffective all human Laws
 must be, without the aid of religion, may be
 easily conceived,—as it is also partly evinced in
 experience.

* Gal. 5. 22.

experience. Remove the fear of God, and you thereby remove also the fear of an Oath ; which is the strongest pledge of veracity between man and man, and that by which the sentence of the Law must be governed. Add to this, that civil Laws can regulate only those particular species of conduct, for which they are enacted, and can have no influence whatever but on the external actions. But religion extends at once to all our principles of action, and subdues even our desires and propensities to evil.

How many virtues, even of the most excellent kind, and highly beneficial to society, which no human authority could ever reach, may we find practised out of a conscience of duty, arising from religious impressions? What Law or authority but that of Conscience alone, could ever oblige men to the practice of benevolence, kindness, compassion, meekness, or humility? What Law could have induced the good Samaritan, as related in our Lord's parable, to relieve the man, who had fallen among thieves, and was neglected by his own Countrymen,—to take him to a place of safety, and provide for his recovery?—Or, on the other hand, how is it possible for any authority merely human, to prevent crimes, which may be practised in secret, and which no eye but that of Omniscience alone, may ever

ever be able to discover?—Eradicate from the mind, the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments, together with a sense of the duty of resignation to the Divine will, and of preserving the life which God hath given us,—then when a man finds himself in difficulty, and becomes tired of life, by what means is he to be restrained from the horrid crime of Suicide? Human Laws have, indeed, done all that they can do in this case, in stamping the Crime with the deepest marks of infamy. But still the Culprit escapes their punishment.

It is only where the fear of God prevails, that we are to expect to find a well regulated mind, or virtuous conduct. This is the best security against crimes of every kind; and the only true foundation of moral rectitude. Where the great principles of religion are generally impressed upon the minds of the people,—a sense of the Divine presence,—the expectation of immortality,—and a sincere belief in the awards of eternal justice,—there we will generally find also a sober and honest deportment, mutual confidence and kindness. There the Laws of the Community will be cheerfully obeyed, because the great motive to obedience is not the fear of human justice, or temporal punishment, but a principle of submission to the will of God. There, also, the

Laws

Laws themselves may be expected to be equitable, and well administered, while those who are in authority, act under a holy and reverential fear of that Supreme Power, by whom "Kings reign, and Princes decree justice."

Let us look into the history of ages past, and inquire who have generally been the greatest disturbers of the public peace,—the men most commonly given to change, faction, and disloyalty. We shall find that they have been two descriptions of men, in most other respects extremely unlike to each other, and even of opposite principles and characters, namely Infidels and Fanatics; who, from different motives, generally agree in neglecting, or despising the common offices and ordinances of religion. The Infidel pays no regard to the institution of religion, because he hath no faith in its doctrines. The Fanatic, on the other hand, imagines himself superior to all the rational forms of devotion, and looks upon the wild fancies of his own restless imagination, as the inspirations of Heaven. Hence, both are equally strangers to the spirit of true Godliness, and remote from the path of moral improvement. The former, as he acknowledgeth no obligation to duty, superior to human authority, or private convenience, will find no scruples of conscience in resisting the au-

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thority of the state, should his inclination be favoured by power and opportunity ; and the latter, despising all sober and rational institutions, whether civil or religious, is led to imagine, that by striving to subvert them, he doth God service. Thus, a total want of religion, on the one hand, and in some cases, mistaken notions of it, on the other, produce similar effects, and prove equally dangerous, and detrimental to the peace of society.

It will be found in all experience, that the sincere Believer in the great truths of religion,—who respects its public institutions, and attaches himself to the forms of a rational devotion, is, in general, the best neighbour, companion, and friend ; and also, for the same reasons, the most peaceable and useful subject of the state. Whatever tends to improve the manners of men, in private life, hath also a proportionable effect on the Community at large. The virtue of individuals is that which constitutes the public virtue.

Such is the nature of the influence, which religion produces, on the moral and political state of society.—We said farther, that religion itself receives a certain influence, from the character and conduct of the Civil Power.

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In as far, indeed, as religion consists in Faith, it is obvious that it can never be subject to the control of any human power or authority. What a man understands, and knows to be true, he will, of course, believe; but he can never be brought to believe what is inconsistent with his knowledge. Such doctrines or principles of religion, therefore, as are objects of Faith simply, can receive no direct influence from the Civil Power. The civil constitution of society, however, and the character and conduct of the civil Magistrate, do produce a certain effect on the religion of the Community. This may be, for example, when favourable to religion, by giving a degree of support, respectability and protection, to its public institutions;—by encouragement also, good example, and the co-operation of the Laws.

It is true that the exercise of the Christian Worship doth not require great external splendour, nor costly ornaments. The chief thing to be regarded, and that alone which is indispensibly requisite, is sincerity of heart. “The true Worshipers” are they that “worship the Father, in spirit and in truth;” whether their devotions be offered up in a palace or in a cottage,—in Temples as richly ornamented as was that of Solomon of old, or in “Dens

and Caves of the Earth ;” such as were the Temples of some of the ancient Prophets and first Christians. Yet when circumstances will admit of it, there certainly is a becoming decency and propriety, in paying attention also to the externals of devotion,—in having convenient places set apart for the Worship of the Deity, with necessary support and accommodation, that all the parts of Divine Service may be performed with becoming solemnity, without confusion or interruption, which is necessary to give them their proper effect upon the mind. In regard to such support and accommodation, and in all matters of external order, religion is capable of receiving aid and encouragement from the Civil Power. As there are unhappily to be found, almost in every community, some vain and foolish men, who have no fear of God before their eyes, who make a mock of things sacred, and whose sport it is to do mischief,—the public institutions of religion require the protection of the Laws, to screen them from insult. “ The weapons of religion,” are not carnal but Spiritual ;”—it claims no civil power or jurisdiction,—takes not up the sword even in its own defence ; but trusting ultimately to the providence of God, for protection and support, commits all its civil rights to the guardianship of the State.

Religion receives also an essential benefit, by the aid, which government affords for the instruction of Youth,—in endowing and supporting public seminaries ; and by all the means, which it employs, for the encouragement of education, and for the general diffusion of knowledge.

It will scarcely be urged by any, at the present day, that good education, or even the highest degree of knowledge, can ever prove detrimental to true religion. The only plausible apology that could ever be offered for a suggestion of this kind, is in the opposition, which the religion of Christ, at first, experienced from those, who professed to be wise men among the Greeks, and from the impious zeal of some modern Philosophers, in the cause of Infidelity. But all that these facts prove, is what no man ever denied ; namely, that knowledge and education enable wicked men to do the more mischief : while, on the other hand, this evil is overbalanced by the additional power of doing good, which they also furnish to the well disposed ; and by the tendency, which good education hath to reform the heart, and to correct vicious inclinations.

True religion hath nothing to fear from the diffusion of knowledge, nor from any inquiry that can

can be made, respecting its grounds and principles. The more it is known, the more it will be respected, and the more certain will be its effects, both on the temper and conduct of its professors. Ignorance, on the contrary, hath the most direct tendency, both to retard its progress, and to corrupt its principles. "My people," saith the Lord, "are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* While for want of instruction, men are deprived of the means of necessary information, they must be exposed to the seductions of error, liable to be misled to their own ruin, by wicked and designing men, or through ignorance of duty, to do evil even when they mean to do good.

The piety and good example of persons in power have also a very considerable effect on the minds of the people, in begetting in them a reverence of things sacred, by representing the exercises of devotion in their true light, as an honourable service and necessary duty. When piety shines from the Throne, as hath many years been the case, in that highly favoured nation to which we belong, it sheds abroad a benign influence, and heavenly lustre, even to the remotest parts of the Empire. When the highest in power and dignity, whom hosts and nations obey, are found humbling themselves before the King of Kings, and openly

* Hos. 4. 6.

acknowledging their dependence on his will and providence, it gives a degree of respectability to religious institutions, in the eyes of the world ; and encourages a spirit of devotion, through all the inferior ranks of society ; while it furnisheth, at the same time, a strong and practical reproof to all profaneness and irreligion.

The reverse is the case, when profaneness and irreligion are countenanced, by the connivance or example of the supreme authority in the state. As saith Solomon, “ They that forsake the law, “ praise the wicked.”† When the laws of virtue or religion are forsaken or neglected, by those who fill the most eminent stations, and are of course looked up to by the rest of the community, this cannot fail to produce the most pernicious effects, on the character of the people in general. It gives confidence to vice, and tends to remove the shame naturally attached to it. Such is the weakness of man, that almost in every part of his conduct, and even in his sentiments, he is, in some degree, influenced by fashion ; in which, it is generally the prerogative of the higher ranks of society to take the lead. Hence, notwithstanding that the duty of attending upon the public institutions of religion is equally incumbent on men in every age, yet we may find it much more

† Prov. 28. 4.

generally practised at one time than another ; which is chiefly to be ascribed to the characters and example of those, whom the unthinking many affect to imitate. Thus, a duty, in its own nature permanent and unchangeable, is, through the weakness and vanity of man, subjected to the blind caprice of fashion.

Another way in which religion may be influenced and aided by the civil Power, is, by the co-operation of the laws of the community ; that is, when the laws are framed in the spirit of Christianity, so as to favour its designs, and to co-operate with its endeavours, in suppressing vice and encouraging virtue. In this respect religion and true policy agree, that one great object of both, is to improve the minds and manners of men, and to subject their actions to wise and salutary rules, which tend to promote their happiness. As religion comes in aid of the civil authority, to subdue the sinful propensities of the heart, and to dispose the will to the obedience of the laws of order and virtue ; so doth the civil authority, on the other hand, second and assist the intentions of religion, by inflicting necessary and deserved punishment, on the incorrigibly wicked and injurious, on whom the motives of religion have no effect, and whom nothing but the strong hand of coercion can restrain from acts of violence or injustice.

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But here we cannot forbear remarking, with regret, that in some christian states, the Legislative authorities, while they were framing laws, professedly and intentionally for the benefit of religion, suffered themselves to fall into an egregious and pernicious error, in claiming a power over the consciences of men;—a power, which belongs to none but God himself, who implanted this faculty in the soul of man. Hence, it is to be lamented, instead of aiding religion, the laws framed on this principle, have proved highly detrimental, both to its progress and purity. In endeavouring, by coercive measures, to bring all men to adopt the same articles of Faith, even in things indifferent, and of no material consequence to life or godliness, while they thereby divided the christian world, the framers of such laws seem to have overlooked this circumstance, that those means which they employed with a view to aid religion, were such as religion itself totally disavows. All persecution, for conscience sake, is inconsistent with the spirit of christianity, and contrary both to the precepts and example of its Divine Author. While men observe an honest and peaceable deportment, without injuring their neighbours, or exciting tumult, discontent, or faction, among the subjects of the state, the civil authority, which watches solely for the good of the community, can have no reasonable ground of

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complaint

complaint against them. Their thoughts and their faith are between God and themselves; and for these they have to answer to God alone. If ever a law was made by mortals, pretending to control and punish the thoughts of men, merely as thoughts, such law was plainly null and void from the beginning, as being framed in contravention of the law eternal. But, on the other hand, if, under colour of religion, men disturb the peace of society;—if a wild enthusiasm lead them, as hath sometimes been the case, to commit acts of violence—to excite discontent—to persuade the people to revolt, or in any other way to endanger the safety of the state, or to injure any of its subjects, this comes fairly before the civil tribunal, as a proper and necessary subject of animadversion. In this case, no pretence of following the principles of their religion, or of obeying the dictates of conscience, can screen the offenders from that severity which the law provides, for the punishment of all crimes of the like kind, by whomsoever committed. Such severity is indispensably requisite to preserve the peace of society: Neither is it incumbent on the civil magistrate, when a crime is committed, to inquire into the motives, which produced it. His maxim is that of the Divine government: “He that doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons.”*

* Col. 3. 25.

It is in vain for men to pretend that religion ought to be altogether independent of the state, and to derive no aid or influence from it. Such a state of things never can exist. You cannot separate the subjects of the state from the members of the religious societies. They are the same individuals. The principles, which they imbibe by their religion, they will act upon in their political capacity, whether as Magistrates or private persons. And on the other hand, the temper of their religion, as well as its progress and respectability, will be liable to some variation, according to the encouragement, which it receives from the supreme authority.

The argument, which some have urged against the utility of civil aid or encouragement, to promote the progress of religion, taken from the wonderful success of Christianity, at its commencement, before it received the sanction of legal authority, is not, in this case, fairly applicable. Its rapid progress, at that time, not only without the sanction of legal authority, but even in opposition to all the power and policy of the world, is justly regarded as one of the greatest Miracles, that attended its establishment. Herein, according to the words of the Apostle, it pleased God to choose " the weak things of the

world to confound the Mighty,"* that it might the more clearly appear to all men, that "this was the doing of the Lord." But now, we are not to look for Miracles. We have no reason to expect any effect to take place otherwise, than by the means naturally adapted to produce it.

Judging it undeniable, then, that there is a certain mutual moral influence necessarily subsisting between the civil and religious state of society, we proceed 2dly, to inquire what we ought to learn from this fact.

1. Hence, we may perceive the ground and certainty of this maxim of Solomon, that "Righteousness exalteth a Nation ; but sin is a reproach to any people ;"† and we may add, must finally prove their ruin. Not only is this maxim verified in experience, but it is also established in nature. We may perceive certain causes, resulting from the nature of man, and constitution of society, which render it impossible, that, in these cases, such effects should not take place.

It will be admitted by all, that industry, mutual confidence, and union, among the subjects of the

* 1 Cor. 1. 27.

† Prov. 14. 34.

the state, have a natural tendency to promote its strength and prosperity ; and that a prevailing attention to decency and good morals, public faith and national honour, is adapted to raise the reputation of any people, in the general esteem of mankind. In recommending the obedience of the Divine Law, to the Israelites of old, Moses adverts to this consequence of such obedience, that it would exalt their character, even in the esteem of the Heathen Nations. “ Keep, therefore, and do them,” saith he, “ for this is your wisdom and your understanding, in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”† But, on the other hand, luxury, mutual jealousy, discord, or general depravity of manners, have as natural a tendency to produce national disgrace and misery.

Will it be urged, perhaps, as an objection to this maxim, that recent experience makes it appear, that a nation may rise into power and consequence, by rapine, cruelty, and injustice, by a disregard to all laws human and divine ?—The objection is so far correct, that by these means, in some peculiar circumstances, a nation may, for a time, increase their power, and render themselves formidable to their neighbours. So also may a
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† Deut. 4. 6.

band of thieves, or maniacs, when they happen to be so numerous, as to overpower the force that is opposed to them. But while, by these means, they are enabled to carry their nefarious plans into execution, and appear to rise superior to the rules of justice and order, they, at the same time, render themselves detestable in the eyes of all good men; call down upon themselves the just vengeance of Heaven; and run head long to their own destruction. How long, in any nation, at one time, such a scene of disorder may be permitted to last, it doth not belong to us to judge. But that it cannot be permanent, nor of long duration, we may confidently believe. There are natural and necessary causes, which, by a silent and gradual operation, must infallibly work its cure, and restore the exercise of injured faith and honour. If ever it be possible for a people, rising into power by unrighteousness, violence, and oppression, to give any degree of stability to a power so acquired, we may venture to affirm that it can only be, by a total change of character.

2. From the nature of the connexion, which, as we have seen, subsists between the civil and religious state of society, we may perceive, that a regard to religion, and a proper attention to its public institutions, are indispensibly requisite for the maintaining of social order, and to promote
national

national happiness. This so clearly results from what hath been previously stated, that we need to do little more here than barely to mention it. If religious impressions be necessary to give effect to civil laws, and if, without due subordination, and obedience to the laws, no nation can prosper ;— it follows, that without religion, no people can attain to a settled state of national happiness. True religion cherishes all the manly virtues, which form the basis of patriotism, and the guard of civil liberty; while it also disposes to peace, order, and humanity. The true christian is the most peaceable subject of the state, in times of tranquility ; and, in time of danger, will generally prove himself most faithful and active in its service. To this kind of conduct he is induced, not solely by human laws, or authority ; but still more, by the dictates of his own conscience ; because his religion teacheth him, that to “ seek the good ” of his country, is the will and command of his maker.

3. Hence we may also perceive how, according to our several stations and capacities, we may effectually promote the good of the community. Whatever a man's rank or office may be, it is always in his power to be a good man: and if he be a good man, he will also be an useful member of society, and a good subject of the state. In this

this respect, it is in every man's power to serve his country, and to advance the national prosperity and happiness.

A good man, who acts under a proper sense of his duty to God, and hath his mind, in consequence, formed to the love of virtue, will always, according to the extent of his influence, recommend the practice of piety and virtue to others, both by his conversation and example. If he be a parent, he will bring up his children, "in the
"nurture and admonition of the Lord,"* early impressing upon their minds, the principles of integrity and honour, and will thereby give so many valuable subjects to the state. If in affluent circumstances, some part of his wealth will be employed, not only to assist the poor, but also to tender useful instruction to the ignorant: or, if invested with power, it will be exercised, with a prudent discrimination, so as to prove, "a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well."

As a private family may be raised to honour, by a steady, virtuous and good conduct, or brought to ruin and misery, by profligacy of manners; so is it also, in the case of whole nations. Infidels, therefore, profane persons, and such as lead immoral lives, whatever their protestations, or even their intentions may be, can never justly be regarded as good subjects of the state; because

* Eph. 6. 4.

their morals and example are inconsistent with those principles, on which alone national honour and prosperity can be founded, and without which civil order cannot be preserved.

Could we find a nation composed entirely of good and virtuous men, no code of criminal laws would there be requisite. Crimes would be unknown among them. Every man's conscience would be his law; and each would do to his neighbour, as he would that his neighbour should do to him. For, "The law," as saith the Apostle, "is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane."* Whoever, therefore, by his power, influence, instruction, or example, contributes, in any degree, to the suppression of those crimes, on account of which the law is found requisite, and to the encouragement of true religion and good morals, thereby doth a real service to the community at large.

4. This subject leads us also to reflect on the happiness, which men enjoy, in a religious view, in living under a settled, wise and liberal form, and administration, of civil government. In a country where the state is embroiled, it is impos-

* 1 Tim. 1. 9.

fible that the church can have rest. All of us, who wish well to religion, will, therefore, cordially join in the sentiments expressed in this Psalm. where our text is, in praying for the peace and prosperity of the nation to which we belong, and the permanence of the government under which we live.

When we look abroad into the world, and perceive the fluctuating and uncertain tenure, by which, in other nations, at the present day, men enjoy any privilege, either civil or religious, we cannot but acknowledge that we are very highly favoured of the Lord, in being placed under the protection of a powerful state, where justice still prevails, and true religion is respected; where we see piety and virtue encouraged; and where all who live peaceably may enjoy full liberty of conscience.

We have this day, Christians, to acknowledge the favour of Government towards ourselves, as a religious community; not merely for that liberty of conscience, which all enjoy, but also for the provision now made for our future accommodation. It is through the Royal Favour, together with your own abundant liberality and laudable exertions, that we have the pious satisfaction of now opening, for the first time, in this city, a
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decent and respectable place of public worship, set apart for the rites and ordinances of the Church of Scotland.

But, in setting apart a place for the performance of Divine Service, it is not the practice of this Church to use any particular ceremony, or formal dedication. This kind of formality is dispensed with, on the following considerations; namely, because it is believed that no place is capable of being rendered more holy than another, by any rites or ceremonies that we can perform; because, God, who filleth Heaven and Earth with his presence, “dwelleth not in Temples made with hands,”* as saith the Scripture; and because, if by consecrating to God one particular spot of ground, we thereby mean, as some understand it, to surrender to him what right we have in it, and to make him the sole owner,—this, it is conceived, were only to make a show of surrendering to our Maker what before belonged to him; for, “The Earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof.”† In setting apart a place for the purpose of divine worship, we, therefore, merely devote it to that particular use; not conceiving that God is, at any time, actually more present there, than he is every where throughout the bounds of the Creation. Yet,

* Acts 7. 48.

† Psal. 24. 1.

when

when we enter this place, where his word is preached, and his name is invoked, he is naturally more present to our minds than at other times : That is, we are then more disposed to deep and serious reflection ; and are, in consequence, more immediately conscious of his presence.

Finally, my Brethren, let us express our gratitude to God, for the many great and inestimable privileges, which we enjoy, by improving them to his glory, and to the good of our fellow-men, by labouring, according to our several places and capacities, to maintain the cause of truth and virtue, and to promote the increase of piety and true religion.

It is hoped that this place shall never be disgraced, by the narrow views of a party spirit, by questions or controversies, which tend to strife, “ rather than godly edifying ; ”—but that it may ever be distinguished by the dispensation of the pure word of life, by christian charity, unaffected piety, with an inviolable regard to truth ; and that for many generations yet to come, this may prove, like the parent Church to which we belong, the nursing mother of a pious, virtuous, and loyal people. This may God, of his mercy and goodness grant, and to his name be praise, now, henceforth, and forevermore. AMEN.

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